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TAGS: [KNNP](#) [MNUC](#) [PARM](#) [NL](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/IRAN: NIE DISMAYS DUTCH DIPLOMATS, BUT  
POLICY REMAINS UNCHANGED

REF: SECSTATE 162558

Classified By: DCM Michael Gallagher for reasons 1.5(b) and (d)

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: On December 4, 2007, Political Counselor and POLOFF delivered reftel points to Dutch MFA officials Herman Quarles and Loek ten Hagen, Deputy Director and Senior Policy Officer at the North Africa and Middle East Department, and Joan Wiegman, Deputy Director for Nuclear Affairs and Non-Proliferation Division. Although FM Verhagen supports continuing pressure on Iran, working level diplomats expressed dismay that the latest National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) "raises so many questions" and "makes our lives more difficult." A leading opposition parliamentarian also expressed support for continuing pressure on Iran. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S) POLCOUNS and POLOFF delivered reftel!points to MFA officials Quarles, ten Hagen, and Wiegman on December 4. All three expressed support for maintaining international pressure on Iran to comply with its NPT obligations, but were disheartened by what they felt was a mixed message from the USG in light of the new report. Wiegman stated twice that the Dutch believe the West should "keep the pressure on" Iran, but she and Quarles noted that the NIE "raises so many questions, including:

-- What should we make of U.S. statements (in the past few years) that Iran is developing a nuclear weapon?

-- With the international sanctions regime not yet in place, what made Iran change its behavior in 2003?

-- What evidence supports the conclusion that Iran was pursuing nuclear weapons before 2003? Will we see more briefings at NATO with this evidence?

-- Is this a positive signal to Iran? Is anybody telling them it could be an opportunity for some positive action?

-- What about Israeli PM Olmert's response to the NIE?

¶3. (S) Quarles looked for positive aspects of the report, proposing that this might be a "face-saving chance for Iran to change its behavior," but emphasized that the NIE has "made our lives more difficult." At the Dutch MFA, "the pressure is on," particularly for working with parliament. The report has also "made EU action more difficult," particularly given Foreign Minister Verhagen's forward-leaning support for stand-alone EU sanctions against Iran if action is blocked at the UNSC. Quarles and Wiegman noted that Parliament was already asking the Foreign Minister to justify this position in light of the apparently diminished Iranian threat. Drawing from reftel, POLCOUNS emphasized that despite the NIE's assessment regarding

current weapons-related activities, Iran's international obligations and the need for international vigilance remain unchanged.

14. (C) Separately, on December 5, the foreign policy spokesman for the opposition Liberal Party (VVD), Hans van Baalen, told the ambassador that the NIE shows that U.S. "democracy is working" and that revealing the report shows President Bush is operating from a "position of strength." The NIE does not mean that U.S. policy has failed. Implying that pressure against Iran is still necessary, Van Baalen intentionally repeated himself: "after 2003, for the short term, maybe, Iran decided not to make a bomb, maybe, for the short term."

15. (U) COMMENT: The Dutch MFA staff were visibly perplexed by the NIE and sought additional information regarding the context and history of the current assessment. Whatever their immediate concerns, however, they are unlikely to lead to a change in Dutch official policy toward Iran. In a letter to parliament on December 4, for example, FM Verhagen stated that "the Netherlands continues to push for diplomatic efforts promoting Iran's full and immediate compliance with UNSC resolutions. ...Iran will actively have to work on restoring international trust in its present and future program. The NIE ... does not change that. It indicates that Iran is currently not actively working on developing a nuclear weapon but does not rule it out for the future."

END COMMENT.  
Arnall